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Wedgworth Leadership Institute  
for Agriculture & Natural Resources



Class  
IX

Let's

# Reflect

## Director's Dialogue *Dr. Hannah Carter*

What is your Plan B?

One of the reoccurring themes for Seminar III was the idea of having a "Plan B"—from discussions with Commissioner Putnam, to touring a nursery to being in the smaller counties and towns along the gulf coast—are there Plan Bs? Does an industry, an organization or a person need a Plan B in case great change or do you persevere and believe that failure is not an option? An interesting theme that emerged from our week in Tallahassee and Franklin, Wakulla and Taylor counties and an interesting theme for leadership as a whole.

One of the changes for Class IX was the combining of the Tallahassee and Panhandle seminars—which meant that our week was truly a marathon. The two days spent in Tallahassee were a whirlwind—but a great learning experience! Highlights of our time in Tallahassee will be included throughout this newsletter. I do want to extend our appreciation to all the alumni who helped with

the arrangements of speakers, tours and meals during this seminar! From Assistant Commissioner Mike Joyner sharing his leadership philosophies, to Representative Halsey Beshears sharing his experiences as a representative, to Richard May sharing his wonderful nursery, to Richard Schwab sharing his passion for the forestry industry—Class IX members were exposed to WLI alumni who are making a difference in the industries and issues that they feel strongly about—which is what this program is all about!

A highlight for me was Tuesday afternoon and the WLI Alumni Legislative Reception. A great crowd of alumni showed up and it was fun to see the interactions between Class IX and those that have gone before them. I believe that the new class is beginning to understand the power and strength of our alumni group with each interaction.

a special thanks go out to Todd Lawrence and Richard Schwab who have made this event happen—since the first year it was held. A big thank you also goes to Alan Shelby for allowing us to take over the deck at the Florida Forestry Association!

Packing three counties into about 48 hours was difficult—but we did it! Even though I have been to these areas and while many of the issues are the same throughout the years, I love seeing the reactions to the people, the issues and the places through the lens of a new class.

Our next seminar in southwest Florida is new—it will also mean that 1/3 of the program will be done—time moves quickly! Our annual alumni meeting will be here before we know it! We're celebrating 20 years since Class I's graduation—so join us and your fellow WLI classmates for a reunion at the Hyatt Coconut Point in Bonita Springs August 8th-10th!



# It's All About Perspective *Matthew Curran*



The hustle and bustle of leadership programming sometimes makes it difficult to really step back and appreciate

what this program is and the unique opportunity that has been given to participate in and experience it. Each of Class IX's first two seminars incited many periods of reflection and times to "take it all in", and Seminar III was no different; however, a major aspect of this seminar that resonated loud and clear were the roles and experiences that alumni are playing and bringing to each new class of WLI.

"To those whom much is given, much is expected." After introductions and some background discussion, Mike Joyner (WLI Class I), Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services began his talk to Class IX on Tuesday afternoon with this very powerful quote from President John F. Kennedy, and really set the tone for the remainder of our short time with him. He spoke to us very directly and charismatically about what it takes to be a leader and the principles that should guide us in our decision making. Things like: Doing the right thing, teaching and mentoring, and playing your position. Within these principles, Mr. Joyner also included a reference to "squinting with your ears". A very profound statement that would garner more discussion within the class as our week went on. It would certainly draw even more attention as we go through our personal and professional lives. We can always take time to listen more attentively and catch all of the details before making decisions. Decisions that not only affect us, but also affect those that are looking to us for guidance and leadership. Remember, "To those whom much is given, much is expected."

Mr. Joyner drove this point home even further with Class IX when discussing the Wedgworth program and experience with us. Again, he provided a list of principles to follow while we are participants in the class:

- Honor the (Wedgworth) name
- Be prepared for each seminar
- Ask the right questions at the right time
- Have a purpose
- Enjoy the experience
- Be open to the BIG picture
- Focus on what you can agree to
- Be a problem solver
- Get through, and THEN accept new challenges
- See it as a game changer
- The program itself makes us special

Much like "squinting with your ears", these guiding principles of the WLI experience really gave Class IX some big picture perspective. This program is special and each one of us has been given a unique opportunity to be a part of it, yet we all have to remember that, at some time, much will be expected of us. Mr. Joyner recounted times when Commissioner Putnam would ask him for his directory of WLI Alumni when seeking guidance or additional advice regarding issues facing the State of Florida or The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Very humbling to think that the Commissioner of Agriculture could at some point, solicit any one of us for counsel. After only spending a short time with Mr. Joyner, it was immediately evident why Commissioner Putnam chose him as his right hand. Mike Joyner, along with many others, has set a very high standard for current and future WLI classes and we were all privileged to have him as a part of Seminar III.

After departing from our session with Mr. Joyner, Class IX was able to pay tribute to former Governor of Florida, Reubin O'Donovan Askew. As a final tribute from the state, former Governor Askew was lying in state in the rotunda of

of the historic old Florida Capitol building. Following the tribute to former Governor Askew, Class IX was welcomed by the Florida Forestry Association for a reception at their office just off the grounds of the capitol. Class IX was able to mingle, meet, and reflect with members of the association as well as many WLI alumni from multiple classes. The alumni provided Class IX with more perspective and recounted many memories and takeaways from their Wedgworth experiences. Again, we were all reminded of the caliber of this program, and the network of people that make it what it is. To conclude our Tuesday session, Class IX ventured back to the capitol grounds and attended the Taste of Agriculture Reception that was hosted by the Florida Farm Bureau. Many Fresh from Florida products and samples were readily available for consumption and Class IX was able to rub shoulders with WLI alumni and some powerful state leaders and legislators.



Late Wednesday morning of Seminar III, Class IX traveled to May Nursery in Havana, and were hosted by another alumnus of the program, Richard May (WLI Class VII). The May family's roots extend back 150 years in North Florida where 4 generations worked the land on shade tobacco farms. Eventually, the family began to see that cigar wrapped tobacco crops were transitioning more towards international growers and after a study, fully converted the farm into a nursery operation in 1971 where the third generation of May's is now continuing the tradition. With 1000+ acres in operation, the nursery grows a

multitude of plants including container grown ornamentals, shrubs, grasses, and perennials. Richard spoke to Class IX in regards to the challenges that his business has faced in recent years. The economic downturn effected many people and businesses, and May nursery itself was not immune. Richard spoke of consecutive years of losses and that they had been approached on more than one occasion to sell the entire operation. They decided to stick things out and business now seems to be on the upturn. Richard's passion and dedication to the business was very evident as we passed up and down the rows of azaleas and junipers. He really loves what he does despite all of the work that is necessary just to keep the doors open. I personally had never seen this type of nursery operation from up close, and without the WLI program, I may never have. Again it became clear how the program is opening doors and laying the foundation for a powerful and diverse network. Also, good to see how a previous participant of the program and his family business are now a part of the leadership programming for the WLI.



Our final morning of programming took place at M.A. Rigoni, Inc. in Perry, FL where we were the guests of another alumnus of the WLI, Richard Schwab (Class VI). Our first speaker of the day was Mr. Gary Brett, Vice President of M.A. Rigoni. M.A. Rigoni Inc. is owned by Richard Schwab's father and his partner and was founded in 1960. They currently employ 38 direct employees and approximately 40 indirect via sub-contracting. They move approximately 600-650 loads of timber each week. 240 of the loads are biomass

(wood chips) for power generation. Many of these loads end up in Gainesville to help "feed" the newly constructed Biomass Power Plant.



The focus of Mr. Brett's talk to Class IX centered on the economic challenges facing Taylor County. Approximately 19% of the residents of the county are currently at or below the poverty line, with a median income of \$37,000. Commercial development and job creation are critical areas of focus as the population of the county is expected to grow by 4-7 times by the year 2060. The population is expected to double by 2040 and almost double again to 95,000 people by 2060. One of the other major issues he mentioned was the need for a more robust Healthcare Network within the county that could service more of the rural communities. With the economic downturn, the local hospital has been facing a very unsustainable \$600-\$800K of write-offs every month. Upon conclusion of Mr. Brett's talk, Richard Schwab then took the floor and spoke more of M.A. Rigoni's operations then took the class to one of the sites where the previously mentioned biomass was being prepared and produced. Only 2 employees were clearing and processing the entire site. A loader and a VERY large chipper were all that was needed to get the job done. The proficiency at which they operated was impressive as they made short work of the piles of timber necessary to complete a load of the biomass. Again, it was good to see a previous participant of the WLI now a part of the programming. I spoke with Richard Schwab about my WLI experience thus far, and how unique the

opportunity was and how the relationships among the class were growing and strengthening. Richard mentioned that his biggest take away from his experience in Class VI was how the WLI stretched him out of where he was at the time, into a person that looked at people, situations, and his own business in completely different ways. More perspective around what the WLI is and what it can, and has done for those who have been chosen to be a part of it.

All in all, Seminar III was very informative and eye opening for Class IX as were the previous two seminars. We were exposed to people, places, and processes that many of us had never experienced firsthand. As previously mentioned, a major takeaway from Seminar III was the caliber of the previous WLI classes and the roles and activities that they are now playing within the current curriculum of Class IX. Many are still employed at the same places they were during their experiences, and some are in new roles, but they are ALL making valuable contributions and have set a very high standard, not only for Class IX, but for all subsequent classes of the WLI. I very much look forward to Seminar IV in Southwest Florida.



Lunch at May Nursery

*Reminder*

**WLI Alumni Meeting**

**August 8-10, 2014**

**Hyatt Bonita Springs**

# Tallahassee in Perspective *Ben Butler*



For most of us, Tallahassee is home to a university and a football team that we either love or hate. To some of us, Tallahassee is a city that represents us all

for two months in the spring, and is forgotten about until football season in the fall. For me, Tallahassee was home to my wife before we met and married. For WLIANR Class IX, Tallahassee is the capital of Florida, home to some of our speakers, and was the starting point for Seminar III.

We began in the Majority Conference Room of the capitol building. Our first speaker welcomed us to Tallahassee, gave our class some of the rules of the road for navigating Florida's capitol and briefly introduced us to the legislative process. Mary Ann Gosa Hooks is the Director of Governmental Affairs for UF/IFAS. A Highlands County native, Mary Ann is no stranger to Tallahassee. Early in her career she worked with then FL Legislator Bert Harris on the creation and passage of his Property Rights legislation. When she talked about the legislative process, her eyes lit up with excitement. She reminded our class that the legislators are just common people making policy decisions on a wide range of issues. For example, an emergency room doctor may be voting on funding a transportation project. Her job, as a lobbyist, was to help educate the elected officials so they could make an informed decision. In closing, she reminded our class that it was up to us to be advocates for our industries.



The remainder of the afternoon Class IX enjoyed the comfort of the blue leather office chairs in the House Chamber while the afternoon speakers stopped by to share with the class. The Clerk for the House of Representatives, Bob Ward welcomed us to the chambers and began giving us the history of the capitol, when to our surprise, he abruptly paused and introduced the President of the Senate, Don Gaetz. After a brief three sentence introduction Senator Gaetz opened the floor up to questions from the class and in Wedgworth fashion, he was enthusiastically bombarded with questions. The senator spent 40 minutes answering questions ranging from how he made decisions, how he selected trusted advisors, his thoughts and opinions on FL's medical marijuana issue, and what he had and had not accomplished as a senator. Once the senator had exited the chambers,



House Clerk Bob Ward returned to the front of the room, jaw on the floor, and reminded our group that during session few people get to spend 40 minutes with the Senate President let alone grill them with questions for that long. The Clerk continued with the history lesson including the murals that line the walls of the chamber. Representative Halsey Beshears (WLIANR Class V) introduced Class IX to the lighter side of the legislative process. His humor and sarcasm quickly turned sober when he concluded his remarks with the reminder that everyone who is elected to public office in Florida will sacrifice something when they come to Tallahassee; family, job, business, etc. The afternoon session concluded with Representative Katie Edwards discussing and answering

questions from the class about the medical marijuana legislation she was sponsoring.

Dinner Monday evening was at the famous Marie Livingston Steakhouse in Tallahassee. Our dinner speaker was perhaps more famous. Florida's Attorney General Pam Bondi joined the class for



dinner and offered some remarks to the group. She discussed a few of the challenges and projects her office was working on including the synthetic drug, spice. The Attorney General also shared with us some pictures of her recent involvement with releasing a rehabilitated Florida panther back into the wild and some of the projects occurring in the Everglades to protect wildlife and the ecosystem.

Tuesday morning our class was invited to sit in on the Florida Ag Coalition meeting. Chairman Spratt gave our group a brief overview of the coalition's purpose, and discussed some of the legislation they were closely watching. We continued our morning session at Florida Chamber of Commerce's conference room receiving an update on Florida's current water issues and policy from the Director of Agricultural Water Policy for FDACS, Rich Budell. He gave a presentation on the history of Florida's water policy and how agriculture has adapted and evolved its conservation and preservation of clean water through irrigation efficiencies and water reuse. He noted that Florida has vast water resources and that the state "will never run out of water but will run out of cheap water". Afterwards, we heard a panel discussion with Rich Budell, Drew Bartlett – Deputy Secretary of DEP and Ron Piasecki with the Wakulla Springs Alliance Board.

The class was on our own for an extended lunch hour. Some of us had meetings with our legislators, sat in on FL

Farm Bureau's Legislative update in the House Chambers and attended committee hearings on agricultural education legislation. While sitting in on a committee meeting, I had an "aha" moment. Part of the legislation being discussed included a provision to allow for recreational SCUBA divers to mark their location using a line tethered to a ball buoy as opposed to a more cumbersome, floating, "diver down" flag. Through my personal experiences, I knew the flag buoy was ineffective at best because strong currents would force the flag to lay sideways defeating the intended purpose of notifying a passing boat that a diver was in the area. As a recreational diver, when I realized such legislation was being discussed, I became so excited that I almost sought recognition for public comment. However, before I could gather my wits, the committee had moved on to the next item of business. That probably was a good thing.

Tuesday afternoon Class IX gathered in the Commissioner of Agriculture's conference room for a one on one Q&A session with Commissioner Putnam. We covered topics from citrus greening, to water and environmental policy, to agriculture's future role in Florida's economy. By the end of our conversation, everyone knew that Florida agriculture was well represented. What we didn't know was how lucky the commissioner was to have a talented and knowledgeable

assistant, in Mike Joyner. Mike (WLIANR Class I) spent a lot of time with our class, giving us advice on how to get the most from our Wedgworth experience. He challenged us to squint with our ears, and to uphold the standards of Wedgworth. From there, we attended the late Governor Askew's memorial in the Old Capitol Building, and then walked to the FL Forestry Office complex for a WLIANR social and mixer. Our night concluded with the Inaugural Taste of Agriculture reception in the plaza between the capitol buildings, where we visited with representatives, senators, their staff and heard remarks from Commissioner Putnam and FL Farm Bureau president, John Hoblick (WLIANR Class II).

For Class IX Tallahassee is a little smaller thanks to the many people that we were introduced to in a short two days. We realize how fortunate we were to get one on one time with as many of our state's leaders as we did. We also realize that the people who have been elected or selected to represent our needs at the state level are just common people who share our common goal of making Florida a better place to live. We are appreciative to Hannah, classmate Baxter, and all of the other people who helped to organize our time in Tallahassee. Now, in the words of Mike Joyner, "to whom much is given, much is expected." It is time for Class IX to foster the relationships made in Tallahassee and make Florida a better place to live.



Mr. Mike Joyner



Commissioner Adam Putnam

## Water Everywhere... *Mallory Dimmitt*



On Day Two, we focused on water issues. The morning started with brief visit to the Ag Coalition meeting, where after introductions we listened to a quick re-cap from each coalition member of the most pressing issues for agriculture in this legislative session. These members explained where various bills stand, and where they are focusing their efforts and why. It was a great way to start the first full day or

programming at the Capital, where we would learn more and go deeper into some of the key issue areas, especially with water. During Class IX's second seminar in Miami, we were challenged to come up with a water-themed BHAG, a Big Hairy Audacious Goal for the class to suggest and take on that addresses a water issue in Florida. We struggled to identify a focused, inspiring and achievable goal, and many in the class felt that we would need a lot of future information and discussion to reach consensus on such a big issue. So it was no surprise that a portion of the

scheduling in seminar three provided a deep dive into water issues from several experts.

Rich Budell, Director of Agriculture and Water Policy at FDACS gave us a very informative presentation that was an overview of ag water issues, and stressed the "generational" nature of the problems. The programs that need to be implemented now will take many years to "fix" current problems, but the time is right to start on some good, long-term approaches. We discussed alternative water supply programs and his hope that funding gets restored to these programs. Mr. Budell mentioned FDACS water conservation programs to help producers retrofit irrigation systems and Commissioner Putnam's goal to see all open seepage irrigation eliminated for more efficient delivery systems.

We then welcomed two more water experts to the room for a panel discussion with Mr Budell; Drew Bartlett from the Department of Environmental Protection, and Ron Piasecki from Wakulla Springs Alliance. Mr. Piasecki explained the issues effecting springs in general and especially Wakulla springs, and

Mr. Bartlett discussed DEP programs related to water quality and quantity, including some successful springs protection and restoration efforts in the last few years. The outlook was generally positive as the state agencies and conservation organizations have water as a top priority and members of the legislature have introduced bills for springs protection, everglades restoration, and other water priorities such as the Indian River Lagoon system.

We capped off our day of water discussion with a question and answer session with Adam Putnam, Commissioner of Agriculture. Commissioner Putnam explained that “this is going to be a money year” of funding and substantial new water project dollars in preparation for policy changes that will occur next year. He reiterated, “this is going to be a huge year for water.” The discussion then switched to citrus greening, among other topics. Commissioner Putnam stressed that “failure is not an option” in

regards to losing the battle to greening because the citrus industry utilizes 500,000 acres of land in Florida and no other crop or crops can fill a void of that size at least in the near term. He summarized the significant funding going to research on greening and the tight timeline for a solution to be found before the different scales of citrus growers are affected. When asked about funding for conservation, Putnam responded that he would like to see funding from Amendment 1 (Florida’s Water and Land Legacy ballot initiative) go to FDACS’s Rural and Family Lands Program “where the value has been proven.” It was wonderful to have the opportunity for a candid class Q&A with Commissioner Putnam.



Commissioner Putnam



Mr. Rich Budell



Wakulla Springs Tour



Judge Jill Walker



Wedgworth Leadership Institute  
**Class IX**  
*Seminar 4*

Southwest Florida



As with previous seminars my experience in Tallahassee and the Florida Panhandle region was amazing. I continue to be awed by the doors that are opened and the time that is spent when the Wedgworth Leadership Institute asks for a meeting or speaker. I think it is a great tribute to the respect that leaders around Florida have for this program and in particular the alumni that have meant so much to their industries and this state.

In retrospect the meetings in Tallahassee are almost unbelievable: the Senate President, the Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Attorney General, multiple state representatives, the Director of Agricultural Water Policy, the Deputy Secretary of DEP, and this list could go on! The breadth of insights and perspectives was incredible.

The time we spent in the panhandle was also great. Learning about the nursery industry with alumni Richard May and the logging and chipping industry with alumni Richard Schwab was eye opening (the chipper being used looked like it could eat a car in seconds!) We also heard about the net ban and aquaculture challenges in the Apalachicola Bay, and how these challenges are having effects on the local community. In turn we heard from Judge Jill Walker who discussed how she has found a balance between upholding the law and helping those in need.

What continues to be clear is that everything is interconnected, events don't happen in a vacuum. As leaders we must be aware, engaged, and ready to act when necessary. We can make a difference and we should strive each day to do so.

- Erin Archey
- Ben Butler
- Joshua Craft
- Josh Culpepper
- Matthew Curran
- Jerry Davis
- Mallory Dimmitt
- Tavis Douglass
- John Evans
- Lee Ann Fisch
- Noah Handley
- Jennifer Hodges
- Rod Hollingsworth
- Justin Hood
- Danny Johns
- Brittany Lee
- David Lively
- Duane Mathis
- Jennifer Parrish
- Brian Patterson
- April Porter
- David Register
- Emma Reynolds
- Daniel Scott
- Scott Smith
- Lauren Trad
- Baxter Troutman
- Frank Wells
- Leigh Ann Wynn



On the steps of the old Capitol Building

